AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1.   (Currently Amended) A method of operating a communications system comprising a packet-switched network, a circuit-switched network, a plurality of gateways connecting the circuit-switched network to the packet-switched network, ~~the~~ said method comprising~~;~~:

a)   receiving packet traffic at one of the gateways;

b)   establishing in the circuit-switched network a circuit from ~~the~~said one gateway to a node on the circuit-switched network; ~~and~~

c)   outputting the said packet traffic from ~~the~~said one gateway onto the circuit of the circuit-switched network; ~~characterised by~~

d)   outputting, from a plurality of gateways, polling messages addressed to the destination address of the packet traffic;

e)   receiving at the gateways replies from the destination address;

f)   determining ~~the~~respective delays for the replies at ~~the~~different ~~respective~~gateways;

g)   selecting one of the gateways depending on the respective delay times; and

h)   establishing ~~the~~a virtual circuit to the gateway selected in step (g).

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2.   (Currently Amended) A method ~~according to~~as in claim 1, in which the circuit-switched network includes a plurality of independently controlled networks and different ones of the plurality of gateways are connected to different respective ones of the plurality of networks.

3.   (Currently Amended) A method ~~according to~~as in claim 1, in which <u>at least</u> one ~~or more~~of the gateways communicate a respective delay time to a control node and the step of selecting one of the gateways is carried out by the control node.

4.   (Currently Amended) A method ~~according to~~as in claim 3, in which only ~~the or~~each gateway having a respective delay value less than a threshold value communicates ~~the~~<u>its</u> delay value to the control node.

5.   (Currently Amended) A method ~~according to~~as in claim 1 in which the packets are Internet Protocol (IP) packets.

6.   (Currently Amended) A method ~~according to~~as in claim 1 in which the circuit-switched network is an ATM (asynchronous transfer mode) network.

7.   (Currently Amended) A control node for use in a method ~~according to~~as in claim 1, the control node including a control processor and a signalling interface, which signalling interface, in use, communicates signals with a plurality of gateways in a circuit-switched network, the control processor being arranged to carry out the following steps in sequence:

a)   communicating instructions to the plurality of gateways to transmit polling messages to a destination address in a circuit-switched network connected to the gateways;

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b)   receiving from the plurality of gateways indications of respective delays in responses to the polling messages~~:~~; and

c)   selecting, depending on the respective delays, one of the gateways as the end-point of a virtual circuit.

8.   (Currently Amended) A gateway for use in a method ~~according to~~as in claim 1, the gateway including a first interface for connection to a packet-switched network, a second interface for connection to a circuit-switched network, and a control processor including a control interface arranged to communicate control signals with a control node, the control processor being arranged to carry out the following steps in sequence:

a)   in response to a control message from the control mode transmitting a polling message to a destination address in the circuit-switched network;

b)   receiving a reply from the destination address and determining the delay of the reply; and

c)   communicating the reply to the control node.

9.   (Currently Amended) A communications network including a control node ~~according to~~as in claim 7 and a gateway ~~comprising:~~including a first interface for connection to a packet-switched network, a second interface for connection to a circuit-switched network, and a control processor including a control interface arranged to communicate control signals with a control node, the control processor being arranged to carry out the following steps in sequence:

a)   in response to a control message form the control mode transmitting a polling message to a destination address in the circuit-switched network;

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b)   receiving a reply from the destination address and determining the delay of the

reply; and

c)   communicating the reply to the control node.